Expedition 6 crew receives a hero's welcome

By Jennifer Ramby

From a change in crew to a new ride home, Expedition 6 members – International Space Station Commander Kenneth Bowersox, ISS Science Officer Donald Pettit and Flight Engineer Nikolai Budarin – were "all about teamwork and flexibility," said ISS Program Manager Bill Gerstenmaier.

The following are mission highlights:

- Backup flight engineer Pettit replaced Donald Thomas just months before launch due to a medical concern identified for Thomas. Bowersox later said that Pettit was "born to be a Space Station Science Officer."
- Expedition 6 launched Nov. 23 aboard Space Shuttle *Endeavour* during STS-113, taking with it the first port truss segment (P1 Truss), which will eventually combine with other segments to provide additional Station cooling and support for a massive power system that will fuel a complex of orbiting laboratories.
- On Dec. 4, the crew took part in the ceremonial lighting of more than 30,000 lights on the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center in New York City.
- Bowersox and Pettit performed their first – and the Station's fiftieth – spacewalk on Jan. 15 to release the remaining launch locks on the P1 Truss radiator assembly, which allowed the radiator assembly to be deployed.
- On Feb. 1, the Expedition 6 crew, like the rest of NASA, lost seven friends. "It's important for us to acknowledge that the people on STS-107 were our friends and we had a connection with them and that we feel their loss, and each of us had a chance to shed some tears. But now it's time to move forward and we're doing that slowly," Bowersox said on Feb. 11 during the crew's first press conference following the loss of *Columbia*.
- Showing their dedication, flexibility and courage, the crew volunteered to do whatever it took to keep the Station occupied and functioning, including staying on the ISS for a year or more.
- In another act of resilience, Bowersox and Pettit performed a second, unplanned spacewalk on April 8 to get ahead on future assembly missions. Bowersox reconfigured electrical connectors to ensure against inadvertent release of truss segments, and Pettit replaced a power relay box in the Mobile Transporter railcar system. They also installed two devices to prevent ammonia leakage from the Station's cooling system, secured a thermal cover on the S1 truss and deployed a light stanchion to assist future spacewalkers.
- Throughout the mission, Pettit remained committed to science. In addition to the 21 planned science experiments, Pettit conducted personal experiments on his own time that became known as Saturday Morning Science. He also wrote several Space Chronicles documenting his crew's experience aboard the ISS.
- After 161 days in orbit, the crew landed May 4 in Kazakhstan aboard the Russian Soyuz TMA-1 capsule, making Bowersox and Pettit the first Astronauts to land in a Soyuz spacecraft.
- The Expedition 6 crew returned to Houston May 21.

NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe and Russian space officials welcome the crew of Expedition 6 to Star City, Russia after their Soyuz capsule landed in Kazakhstan.

jsc2003e33759 Photo by Bill Ingalls

JSC Director Jefferson D. Howell, Jr. and the Expedition 6 crewmembers pose for a photo following the crew arrival at Ellington Field.

jsc2003e37463 Photo by David DeHoyos

Kyrstyn Wright presents Commander Ken Bowersox with flowers at the Crew Return ceremony. Wright is the granddaughter of United Space Alliance's Nancy Wilkerson, Technical Integrator in the ISS Program's Requirement Increment Integration Office.

jsc2003e40054 Photo by David DeHoyos

It is because of you that the ISS, the brightest star on the horizon, continues to shine.

Russian Aviation and Space Agency liaison Sergei Ripkin, during the crew's welcome home ceremony May 27

LEFT TO RIGHT FROM TOP

The Expedition 6 crew's official portrait: Astronauts Don Pettit, Expedition Six ISS Science Officer; Ken Bowersox, Mission Commander; and Cosmonaut Nikolai Budarin, Flight Engineer, attired in training versions of the Shuttle launch and entry suit. Budarin represents Rosaviakosmos.

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Expedition 6 ISS Science Office Don Pettit, pictured onboard the ISS.

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The Expedition 6 crewmembers give a thumbs-up onboard an aircraft flight from Kazakhstan to Moscow after their Soyuz capsule landing.

jsc2003e33758 Photo by Bill Ingalls

Expedition 6 Commander, shown working onboard the ISS.

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Expedition 6 Flight Engineer Nikolai Budarin, shown training at JSC.

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HOMEWARD BOUND

by Don Pettit

The following was NASA ISS Science Officer Don Pettit's final Space Chronicle during his mission. To read his other entries, which cover topics ranging from Saturday Morning Science to what space smells like, visit http://spaceflight.nasa.gov/station/crew/exp6/spacechronicles.html.

The feeling of being home is directly proportional to how far you have traveled. When you go out to dinner, you feel home when you pull into the driveway. When you go for a drive to a state park some distance out of town, you feel home when you enter the outskirts of your city. When you drive across the United States, perhaps on one of those memorable family vacations, you get this warm feeling of being home when you cross over your state line. When you go on international travels, particularly when returning from places with radically different cultures, you feel home the first place your airplane lands on U.S. soil. You may still be 2,000 miles from home, but you have this wonderful sensation in your heart that speaks out to you.

After having been on Space Station for nearly six months, we will be returning on the Soyuz spacecraft and be landing on the desert plains of Kazakhstan. When our capsule goes thump on those desert flats, we will be literally on the opposite side of the world, nearly 12,000 miles from home. Yet once normal breathing resumes, we will have this warm sensation inside that we are home. I can picture sometime in the future, a crew will be returning from Mars and after inserting themselves into low Earth orbit, perhaps from an aero-braking maneuver, they will look down from their orbital vantage point at this blue jewel circling below and say, "We are home."